



## Youth Protection Policy

### 1. Statement of Conduct for Working with Youth

- a. Bethel Lutheran Church ("Bethel") is committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for all participants in Bethel activities. It is the duty of all Bethel members and volunteers, to the best of their ability, to prevent abuse or neglect, and to safeguard the youth with whom they come into contact in Bethel activities. To this end, Bethel Lutheran Church has prepared this Youth Protection Policy. This policy applies to all church related activities that involve youth. This policy and the related procedures will help educate church employees and youth ministry volunteers about their role in preventing abuse and injury, providing general procedures to reduce these risks, and implementing a method of effective response if an incident should occur.

### 2. Definitions

- a. **Youth Ministry Volunteer:** Any adult (18 years old or older) involved in any Bethel Youth activity who has specific interaction focused on youth, either supervised or unsupervised.
- b. **Youth:** Those people, under the age of 18, who are involved with any Bethel Youth activity.
- c. **Church Employee:** Any paid staff member of Bethel Lutheran Church (including pastoral staff).
- d. **Youth Ministry Committee (YMC):** Reviews and updates the Youth Protection Policy on a regular basis. The YMC receives any recommendations of policy modifications.
- e. **Bethel Youth Protection Team (BYPT):** Supports training efforts related to youth protection and the Youth Protection Policy. Oversees and assists in the implementation of the Youth Protection Policy for the whole church.
- f. **Abuse:** An intentional act committed by a person in a position of trust (parent, caregiver, other) which harms or threatens to harm a child's welfare or physical/mental health.

### 3. Volunteer Registration and Background Screening

- a. All youth ministry volunteers must complete and submit a Youth Volunteer Application and Background Check Form annually.
- b. The process of completing a Background Check and Youth Volunteer Application does not guarantee acceptance as a youth ministry volunteer. Church employees have the discretion to accept or deny an application for any reason or for no reason.

### 4. Volunteer Training

- a. All youth ministry volunteers will receive training regarding the Bethel Lutheran Church Youth Protection Policy and related procedures.
- b. The training will be developed by the Bethel Youth Protection Team and approved by the Youth Ministry Committee.
- c. A record of trained volunteers shall be maintained by a designated church employee and should be updated annually.

### 5. General Guidelines for Working and Meeting With Youth

- a. When meeting with youth, it is recommended that church employees and volunteers do so in view of other adults. It is understood and recognized that there will be times when a youth desires to meet with a church employee privately. During those times it is recommended that

the meeting occur in view of other adults whenever possible. There are exceptions to this recommendation that should be articulable.

- b. Alcohol shall not be consumed while working with youth on church property or when off-site working with youth in a church related activity. Receiving Communion is an exception to the no alcohol rule. Additionally alcohol should not be consumed prior to working with youth if the consumption is detectable at the event.

#### 6. The Two Adult Rule

- a. Bethel requires there to be at least two adults assigned to any scheduled youth activity, regardless of the number of youth attending. Adults should monitor one another's interaction with youth. The adults are also to be available to the youth in case of emergencies. Younger persons may assist adults, but should not take the place of adult workers and/or volunteers.
- b. One instructor may be alone in a room with several youth only if other adults, such as instructors in other classrooms, are in close enough proximity to monitor the classroom and regularly observe the activities.
- c. A youth leader may supervise younger children as long as an adult is in close proximity and is able to observe activities.

#### 7. Activities Involving Overnight Accommodations

- a. If youth activities involve overnight stays, adults and youth should not sleep in the same room or single accommodation. If no other option exists due to physical limitations of a given space, then adults should follow the *Two Adult Rule*.
- b. Males and females will have separate sleeping areas.
- c. Adult youth ministry volunteers and/or church staff may enter the sleeping quarters of youth to monitor behavior and ensure safety. The *Two Adult Rule* shall be followed unless there is a clear emergency.
- d. Youth and adults may occupy the same accommodation if said accommodation includes multiple sleeping quarters separated by doors.
- e. If separate shower facilities are not available for male and female youth and adults, separate times shall be scheduled and posted for showers.
- f. In all co-ed youth activities involving overnight stays, youth must be accompanied by at least one adult male and one adult female.

#### 8. Allegation Reporting Guidelines

- a. All allegations of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously and must be handled in accordance with the Youth Protection Policy's Abuse and Neglect Allegation Reporting Guidelines.
- b. If there is an allegation or suspicion of abuse or neglect, the allegation or suspicion will be reported to the Lead Pastor and the Business Administrator. At that time, the Lead Pastor and the Business Administrator shall promptly consider whether the allegation or suspicion should be reported to law enforcement. In the event that the allegations or suspicions are against the Lead Pastor or the Business Administrator, it is not required to report the allegations to the accused.
  - i. Determination to report
    - 1. If the determination is that it should be reported, law enforcement will be notified.
    - 2. A process review will be conducted by the BYPT.
  - ii. Determination not to report (or if undecided)
    - 1. The Lead Pastor and the Business Administrator do not have the authority to decide not to report an allegation of abuse or neglect. Therefore, if the Lead Pastor the Business Administrator believe the matter should not be reported, then the Church Council President will be notified and consulted.

2. Any final decision not to report the allegation/ suspicion to law enforcement must be made collectively by the Lead Pastor, the Business Administrator, and the Church Council President.
  3. If it is decided not to report the allegation(s) of abuse or neglect, Bethel may conduct an internal investigation. Additionally, a process review will be conducted by the BYPT.
- iii. In the event that the allegations or suspicions are against the Lead Pastor, the Business Administrator, or the Church Council President, then the Church Council's Vice President shall take the place of the accused in the process outlined above.
- c. Bethel will cooperate with all law enforcement, child protection services and legal investigations, and may conduct its own investigation if an allegation directly involves Bethel programs and if such investigation does not interfere with other investigations.
  - d. To prevent the risk of further abuse, an individual accused of child abuse shall be immediately relieved of all duties related to work with youth while the investigation is ongoing. The reinstatement decision will be made upon the conclusion of the investigation in conjunction with other decision-making bodies and policies at Bethel Lutheran Church.

Policy Action	Revision	Date	
Original	Approved by Church	2016	Youth Team, Chris Anderson
Revision	Revised language	March 2025	Chris Anderson, Governance